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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000055

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: KING SEES "POSITIVE SIGNS" AFTER
DISCUSSIONS WITH PARTIES

REF: KATHMANDU 0046

Classified By: AMB. MICHAEL E. MALINOWSKI. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

¶1. (C) On January 7 Prabhakar Rana, King Gyanendra's business partner and confidant, telephoned the Ambassador on the King's behalf to advise that the monarch has concluded his consultations with the leaders of political parties (Reftel). Press accounts of the discussions (most of which indicate a tepid response from the political leadership) are not accurate, Rana emphasized, although he acknowledged that Nepali Congress leader G.P. Koirala, who told the press he was not "hopeful" for reconciliation after meeting the King, is proving the most recalcitrant. Having met the party leaders, the King believes he sees "positive signs" of a possible breakthrough in the deadlock between the parties and the Palace, Rana reported, and plans to consult further on the matter with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa upon his return from the SAARC Summit in Islamabad later in the day.

¶2. (C) For now, Rana said, the King is awaiting the parties' responses in writing to his seven-point program for national consensus (Reftel). (Note: The seven points are: national consensus; national unity; peace and security; good governance; controlling corruption; elections that reflect the people's wishes; and a government on the basis of all-party consensus. End note.) Obviously there will be differences in viewpoint among the parties, he admitted, but the King believes these can be thrashed out during further consultations. With the parties' responses in hand, these differences can be identified, worked through, and, ultimately, consensus achieved. Only after he attains the parties' consensus on a national program will the King entertain discussions about appointing a consensus Prime Minister, Rana stressed, adding that the monarch has already ruled out reinstating Parliament as a possibility. The King has asked nothing else from the parties than their development of such a consensus, Rana continued, emphasizing that the King was not, for example, necessarily expecting the parties to cease their protests against him.

¶3. (C) According to UK Ambassador Keith Bloomfield, Madhav Nepal, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML), termed the King's seven-point proposal "an academic exercise." For Nepal, who met the King on January 2, appointing an all-party government should precede development of a national consensus. Nonetheless, the UML is responding to the King's challenge by developing its own proposals for a program of national consensus, which, Nepal cautioned, "might not" necessarily parallel the King's own proposal. (Note: Adoption of a 10-point "road map" for the future is on the agenda of the UML Central Committee meeting today. The party hopes to release its "road map" to the public on January 9. End note.)

¶4. (C) Comment: Since the King dismissed the government of former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in October 2002, the parties have focused nearly all of their energy into protests against the Palace and rallies against "regression." While the parties have been fairly energetic in expressing what they are against, they have been somewhat less active in articulating what they are for--or how best to reassert the rule of law and restore peace and stability to their constituents' troubled lives. While party leaders may attempt to dismiss the King's proposed program as an "academic exercise," it will be difficult for them to disagree publicly with his request for national consensus on such fundamental principles as good governance, democratic elections, and national unity without proposing an alternative vision for Nepal's future. While it may be too early to determine if the King's overture will succeed in reconciling the Palace with the parties, we are hopeful that his initiative will, at the very least, prompt the parties to begin formulating their own proposals to help redress the many problems--from the insurgency to widespread corruption to rampant social inequities--that continue to plague Nepal.

MALINOWSKI